CREATING ‘AUTHENTIC’ COMMUNITIES AMONG THE MIDDLE CLASS:
A CASE STUDY OF NEW ORGANIC FARMERS IN
SOUTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

by

Kathryn Grace Petrusa

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Abstract
This thesis investigates the construction of community and how it is used to create the identity of small-scale (often) organic farmers who are growing food for local customers. Using ethnographic methods, I explore the meaning of community both among local, organic farmers, but also investigated its salience within the interactions between the farmers, their customers and the wider public (markets, public events, media and exhibitions). To my ethnographic findings, I apply notions of the ‘new middle class’ and its relationship to authenticity to explore why food and farming are providing such a successful venue for a community of people to gather and mobilize around. I describe the “lived” community of organic farmers and its distinctions from a more widespread “public” farming community and its representations, which are increasingly available to mainstream North American culture. I critique these public representations of farming because of the ways they conjure images that gloss over those who have access to locally farmed food and who benefits from this industry. I draw attention to this dynamic with the hope that this critique will bring a new awareness to the local food movement, thus contributing to its success.
Preface

The original research conducted to complete this Master’s thesis required the approval of the UBC Research Ethics Board. The Behavioural Research Ethics Board issued the certificate and the certificate number for this Minimal Risk project is H11-00300.
Table of Contents

Abstract................................................................................................................................. ii
Preface..................................................................................................................................... iii
Table of Contents ................................................................................................................... iv
List of Tables ......................................................................................................................... v
List of Figures ....................................................................................................................... vi
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................... vii

1 Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 1
  1.1 A Place to Gather ........................................................................................................... 1
  1.2 Farming is Community ............................................................................................... 1
  1.3 Methodology ............................................................................................................... 2

2 A ‘New’ Class of Farmers ................................................................................................. 7
  2.1 North American Organic Agriculture Trends .............................................................. 7
  2.2 New Organic Farmers ................................................................................................. 8
  2.3 The ‘New Middle Class’ Identity ................................................................................ 8
  2.4 ‘New’ Social Movements ........................................................................................... 9
  2.5 Class as Performance .................................................................................................. 10
  2.6 Authentic Communities .............................................................................................. 10
  2.7 The Farmers ............................................................................................................... 12

3 Authentic Connection to the Land ................................................................................... 14
  3.1 A “Lived” Connection to Land .................................................................................. 14
  3.2 Hard Work and Challenge Creates Connection ......................................................... 16

4 Authentic Connection to People ...................................................................................... 19
  4.1 A “Lived” Connection to Community ........................................................................ 19
  4.2 Connecting to the “Public” Community ...................................................................... 21

5 Relationships and Self-Reliance ..................................................................................... 24
  5.1 Self Reliance ............................................................................................................... 24
  5.2 Opposition to Conventional Farming .......................................................................... 25
  5.3 The Future of Conventional Farming .......................................................................... 27

6 Farming as Livelihood ...................................................................................................... 30
  6.1 New Organic Farmers as Educators .......................................................................... 30
  6.2 New Organic Farmers as “The Antidote” .................................................................. 31

7 Conclusions: Where Are We Going? ............................................................................ 38

References .......................................................................................................................... 41

Appendix A: Interview Questions ....................................................................................... 43
List of Tables
Table 1: New Organic Farmers in this Study................................................................. 13
Table 2: Conventional vs. Organic Farmers as Described by New Organic Farmers .......... 27
List of Figures

Figure 1: Rainbarrel ................................................................................................................. 34
Figure 2: Harold Steeve’s Hat................................................................................................. 34
Figure 3: Preserves from the Community ............................................................................ 34
Figure 4: Hastings Folk Garden .......................................................................................... 36
Figure 5: ‘Binners’ at United We Can ................................................................................... 36
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1 Introduction

“You become a part of this community whether you like it or not [...] There’s not much choice in it.”
~Glacier Farm

1.1 A Place to Gather

Walking down the row of local produce and food vendors at a Farmer’s Market is an aesthetically pleasing event, a flurry of activity, sights, sounds, shapes and colours. Amid the coloured vendor tents and fresh vegetables on display, customers weave through the market, armed with cloth carry bags for trundling away their carefully selected, valuable food purchases. In Vancouver, BC, the markets are always well-attended events, often with lineups forming in front of tents and stalls. In a quiet moment, customers engage in congenial conversations, and form relationships with the farmers who grew the food, now in their cloth carry bag. Several farmers bring their small children to the markets, slung across their mothers’ chest, and let their older children play behind the stall. As a customer walking through the centre of market, one has to step carefully to dodge strollers and toddlers, dogs on leashes, the occasional small group of acquaintances engaged in animated conversation. There are places to sit down and stay a while, to drink coffee, sample fresh purchases, or snack on food vendors’ creations, which often use farm produce.

1.2 Farming is Community

This is an investigation of how community is constructed and used to create the identity of small-scale (often) organic farmers who are growing food for local customers. I completed an exploratory ethnography of the meaning of community both among local, organic farmers, but also investigated its salience within the interactions between farmers, their customers and the wider public (markets, public events, media and exhibitions). While community was the most prominent theme to emerge from my ethnography, my analysis of this theme applies notions of the ‘new middle class’ and its relationship to authenticity to
explore why local food and farming are providing such a successful venue for a community of people to gather - and as we shall see, even mobilize around. To do this, I describe the “lived” community of organic farmers and the linkages between this and a widespread “public” farming community, which is increasingly available to mainstream North American culture. I argue that the connections between a “lived” and “public” community is integral to small-scale organic farmers in the 21st century and permeates their daily life by fueling the desire to both start and continue farming, facilitating the transmission of knowledge of farming to peers and laypeople and ultimately, determining their ability to make a living. In Chapter 2, I review current trends in small-scale organic agriculture in North America and BC, define what is meant by the term ‘New Organic Farmers’ and apply concepts of ‘new middle class’ and authenticity to the community of New Organic Farmers. In Chapter 3 and 4, I elaborate on how farmers’ “lived” experiences with the land, each other, and their customers drives their connection to local, organic farming. In Chapter 5, I explain New Organic Farmers’ desire for self-reliance and their efforts to become independent from industrial agribusiness and conventional farming systems, an attitude that paradoxically underscores the importance of community and connection. In Chapter 6, I reflect on how New Organic Farmers’ translate these experiences into valuable knowledge, sought after today by governments, corporations, universities and the general public, producing a “public” farming community. I conclude by suggesting the ways that the centralization of community may be strengthening organic agriculture, but also provide some cautionary remarks about its drawbacks.

1.3 Methodology

Beginning in 2008, I had become very interested in organic agriculture, and for the next two years attended Farmer’s Markets weekly, visited and worked on several rural farms throughout southwestern British Columbia and grew my own food at home. When I was accepted as a part-time practicum student at Uniform Farm for eight months in 2010, I began
to form larger questions asking what really drove the farmers and their customers invested in the organic agriculture industry. Why did so many of us involved with growing food have no prior exposure to farming as a profession? Is it coincidence that most of us have completed formal education? Why were we so opposed to large-scale conventional farming?

As part of my practicum, I was invited to see Farmer Joel Salatin speak at UBC, which incidentally began my ethnographic study in September 2010. Salatin is a farmer featured in Michael Pollan’s New York Times bestseller *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* and the documentary *Food Inc.* At the close of the talk, I was again filled with questions: When did farmers become celebrities? Why did Joel come all the way from Virginia to talk to Vancouverites and be a keynote speaker later that evening? I realized that attending this event began to hint at the important link between the farmer and the wider public. I kept attending these events as I heard about and looked for them: the Museum of Vancouver’s (MOV) *Home Grown* exhibit (October 2010), SFU Centre for Dialogue’s Will Allen talk (January 2011), the Langley Centennial Museum’s exhibition called *Hooves, Ploughs and Planting Fields* (August 2011) and the 2011 International Vancouver Film Festival screening of the documentary, *To Make a Farm*, followed with a public discussion with the director (October 2011). I selected these events for their degree of corporate and government support, as well as their prominence in the public eye through media and word of mouth. In particular, I selected the MOV museum exhibit because of the collaborative nature employed in its curation; the exhibit was designed using materials from community members, including the farm I knew I would be interning with the following summer, Galaxy Farm.
To compliment the “public” understandings of New Organic Farmers, I conducted four months of participant observation at “Galaxy Farm”,¹ a small scale, organic farm in the Fraser Valley in the company of four New Organic Farmers. This fieldwork was invaluable for gaining insight into the “lived” experience of a New Organic Farmer, and to begin intimately understanding daily life, when not in the public eye. During this four-month period, I was a paid employee of the farm, living the daily schedule and being required to meet the expectations of my employers. I selected Galaxy Farm because I had connected with the farmers there while on a field trip as a practicum student at Uniform Farm and I learned of their willingness to hire people interested in learning about farming as a career. More importantly, I had heard about Galaxy Farm from its regular presence in activities in the local food community and for its prominence in various public settings.

In addition, I conducted seven semi-structured interviews with New Organic Farmers. I began interviewing in March 2011, two months before immersing myself in life at Galaxy Farm. I began with two contacts I had made during my time at Uniform Farm, and interviewed both at the farm. These interviews lasted one hour each, and the questions were designed with two specific goals in mind. The first goal was to ask the informants what “farming” as a concept meant to them, and why they are farming. The second was focused on collecting life histories in an attempt to draw out aspects of ‘middle-classness’, or to understand the upbringing and privileges they had had so far. The idea of middle-classness, as it relates to the production of authenticity, is a theoretical frame that I bring to this research because I had observed a theme of urban, educated young people being attracted to this vocation in relatively large numbers.

¹ The names of farms and farmers throughout are pseudonyms. I did this because the organic community is very small and I wanted my informants comfortable to speak freely.
My next two interviews took place in a small town about two hours drive from Vancouver. I had met the farmers from Fresh Air Farm during a field trip taken as part of the Uniform Farm practicum, so I asked them to interview because of that connection. Having frequented the Farmer’s Markets so often, I knew of a neighbouring farm to Fresh Air Farm, who were a young couple with a baby on the way. I made a cold call and set up an interview with Glacier Farm on the same day I drove up to see Fresh Air Farm. I used the same set of questions with Uniform, Fresh Air and Glacier Farm.

After completing these four interviews, I transcribed each interview, and using grounded theory, coded the transcriptions to draw out salient themes (Farnell and Graham 2000:411). The concept of community clearly emerged from each of the interviews, as each set of farmers used the term and described the term to me during the interview, without any prompting. Another theme that emerged clearly from the first four interviews was that of “distinction” or opposition to conventional, large-scale farmers. With both of these emergent themes identified, I headed into my participant observation fieldwork on Galaxy Farm with this focus.

I waited until September to conduct formal interviews with two of the Galaxy Farm farmers. In large part, this was due to the fast pace and fatigue faced by all of the farmers through the regular season, and the luxury I had knowing I could visit my field site with relative ease, for subsequent visits after fieldwork finished. Also in September, I was taking a Directed Studies reading course on social movements; in particular, Alberto Melucci’s ‘new social movements’ and their linkage to the ‘new middle class’ were of particular interest to me. These readings influenced the interviews in September, which brought in questions about community solidarity, the oppositional relationship to conventional, large-scale agriculture and organic farming in the public eye.
I decided only to interview two of four New Organic Farmers at Galaxy Farm, because I developed very close personal friendships with two of the farmers. While we had many informal and even theoretical conversations contributing to my field notes, I felt a formal interview could run the risk of telling me what I “needed” to hear. My final interview was with Peach Pear Farm, a New Organic Farmer I met when she visited Galaxy Farm one morning. I told her about my project and she agreed to do an interview after the growing season. For the interviews with Galaxy Farm and Peach Pear Farm, the bulk of the questions were designed as open-ended questions to probe for farmers’ views on why they farm today and about their interactions with the public and the farming community. In addition, I accessed and transcribed one online interview with the artist who designed the MOV exhibit in the autumn of 2011. As such, these interviews were designed with a purposive sampling method, which focuses on a very particular section of the organic farming community.

After returning from fieldwork in the fall, I coded my field notes and the last three interviews. These codes were based on an amalgamation of data from my initial interviews and recurring themes emerging from field notes, including: connection to place, community, social movements, conventional farmers vs. small-scale farmers, passion for food itself, political views and lifestyle. I applied examples of these themes to social movement literature according to Alberto Melucci’s (1989) definition of a ‘new social movement’: solidarity and community, opposition to an adversary and actions designed to break out of a system. I completed a secondary round of coding through this new lens, which included community, connection to people, land and food, transmission of knowledge, respect for farming, opposition to conventional farming, farmer identity and self-reliance.

Please see Appendix A for a final list of interview questions used, which has evolved from my first interview in March 2011.
2 A ‘New’ Class of Farmers

“In recent years, the ‘most advanced’ white people have quit their jobs, moved to the country and opened artisanal dairies and small scale radicchio farms.”
~Stuff White People Like, #132 (2010)

2.1 North American Organic Agriculture Trends

There is a polarization occurring in North American agriculture in the 21st century. Industrial agriculture exists on one end, including “major agricultural chemical and equipment companies, the principal grain, processing and packing companies, the major grocery and restaurant outlets, and the majority of farm producers” (Thompson 2000: 217). On the other end is small-scale agriculture, “a loose network of organic and regional producers, chefs, and ordinary food consumers” (ibid). The overwhelming majority of farmers are still considered industrial, as organic and regional agriculture makes up a very small proportion of food purchased in North America, between 4 to 8% (ibid). Still, there is a widespread recognition of the growth in organic, or sustainable agriculture, both among farmers and consumers (Allen 2000; Best 2009; Canadian Organic Growers 2010; Hassanein 2003; Starr 2010; Statistics Canada 2010).

While their impact remains small on paper, organic and ‘local’ farmers, like Joel Salatin are being lauded today across public media and various social arenas as important ecological stewards, traditional agrarians, peaceful pastoralists, and husbanders of the land (Starr 2010: 482). University-run programs teaching organic and regional agriculture techniques are being established all over Canada and the US. Among other print media, journalists for The New York Times are writing about New Organic Farmers (2011), film makers are producing documentaries about New Organic Farmers (To Make a Farm, The Greenhorns), countless books are being written about New Organic Farmers (A Dirty Life, Trauma Farm), organic and local farming is the focus of museum exhibits, and organic and local farmers are embarking on national speaking tours. Sustainable agriculture is indeed a social movement in the 21st century (Starr 2010, DeLind 2010, Hassenein 2003: 83).
2.2 New Organic Farmers

The local, organic agriculture seen today in the media and these other social contexts increasingly involves what I call “New Organic Farmers”, farmers generally characterized with urban backgrounds, high levels of formal education, minimal previous farming experience (0-6 years), youth (ages 20-35) and being female (Best 2009; NY Times 2010; Abercrombie and Urry 1983:7). New Organic Farmers demonstrate aspects of what Pierre Bourdieu dubbed ‘cultural capital’, a capital achieved not by a large income or property, but through cultural knowledge (1977). The qualities of a New Organic Farmer also characterize individuals most likely to be involved with ‘new social movements’ (Melucci 1989; Maheu 1999; Eder, 1993: 168; Hines 2010: 291). Alberto Melucci describes the groups involved with new social movements as the ‘new middle class’, those who have considerable educational backgrounds and relative economic security (1989). I suggest that both New Organic Farmers and customers supporting the local, organic movement generally fit the description of the ‘new middle class’ (Eder, 1993: 133; Allen and Kovach 2000: 230).

2.3 The ‘New Middle Class’ Identity

In general terms, ‘middle class’ is a complex notion, which cannot be easily bounded as a category, because it includes countless forms of competing cultural capital, an ambiguous relationship with the capitalist market, and mechanisms of downplaying its class privilege (Liechty 2003:10). However, it is an integral component to understanding the New Organic Farmer identity, particularly because social movements rooted in privileged classes are likely to have a great impact in mainstream society (Eder 1993: 179; Johnston et al: 1994: 54). Similarly, the label of the New Organic Farmer cannot truly be bounded and rigidly defined, but serves as a useful descriptor in this ethnography. The middle class is a position determined not by a traditional class relation to the “means of production” (selling labor or owning capital) but by its relationship to the market (Liechty 2003: 17; Eder 1993). Liechty observes
that the middle-class constructs “itself in opposition to its class others...and the middle class emerges as a never-ending cultural project that is simultaneously at odds with itself and with its class others” (Liechty 2003: 15, my emphasis). The nuance present in the word ‘new’ in ‘new middle class’ is central to this analysis, and should be understood in two ways. Firstly, ‘new’ here connotes a specific dilemma by which people reconcile the position as “modernity’s ‘traditional’ other” (Liechty 7:2003). In other words, this dilemma requires the ‘new middle class’ to appeal to an aesthetic sense of tradition in their contemporary setting. Melucci defines the ‘old middle class’, as occupied by farmers and craftsmen, which suggests that farming (and craftsmanship) (1989: 52) is part of an ‘old’ or “originary condition” of the middle class (Bessant 2011: 26). Secondly, another nuance of ‘new’ as it relates to the middle class is this group’s skill at social integration, allowing for relative ease in obtaining educational achievement and professional skills. Melucci argues that these skills also allow this group to use a position of conflict to develop into a counter-elite role. (Melucci 1989: 52).

2.4 ‘New’ Social Movements

Alberto Melucci defines ‘new social movements’ as a “social symbol operating in modern society, illustrating a symbolic challenge to the dominant power structures” (1985; 1989: 12, my emphasis). Identity formation of a group or “group particularity” (in this case local, organic farmers) is the key characteristic making a social movement ‘new’ (Vahabzadeh 2001: 612). Within ‘new social movements’, group identity itself becomes the form of resistance and is performed in cultural realms of society (ibid: 613; Melucci 1980: 221). Furthermore, Melucci defines a ‘new social movement’ as conflict-based public behaviours “which transgress the norms that have been institutionalized in social roles” (Vahabzadeh: 620). New Organic Farmers are taking action in opposition to industrial farming (Thompson 2000), and these very same actions are garnering widespread support of institutionalized social norms and winning the hearts of a greater public. The following case study of New Organic
Farmers is an example that complicates Melucci’s suggestion that opposition takes the form of deviance or transgression, but instead can create new social roles.

2.5 Class as Performance

My interest here is to understand how New Organic Farmers navigate and communicate their oppositional and amorphous class identities to themselves and others as performance (Bettie 2003: 50). Bettie notes that on the one hand, “publicly performing a particular class culture matter[s] significantly more than [its] origins” yet on the other, class origins matter significantly as classes have differential access to resources, both economic and cultural (2003: 50). For Bettie, performing class “refers to agency and a conscious attempt at passing” and performativity refers to an unconscious display of cultural capital emerging from internalized class origins (2003:51). I argue that New Organic Farmers narrate and create their middle-classness through performance and performativity, and create “authentic” experiences in doing so. If, as I am suggesting, that at times New Organic Farmers are required to perform (or pass with) their identity, the degree of “authenticity” becomes critical to the experience of the audience. In this vein, authenticity is communicated by the quality of experience this identity produces, and becomes more relevant when it is experienced publicly (Hines 2010: 295; Handler and Saxton 1988; Bettie 2003). As Hines argues, narrating experience is part of identity formation, as narration serves to authenticate farming experiences for the narrator and for others (2010: 295).

2.6 Authentic Communities

How does one perform an “authentic” experience? What does it mean for something to be experienced “authentically”? A basic interpretation of authenticity “concerns the idea of an originary condition or essential nature (i.e., state of being)”, or ‘tradition’ (Bessant 2011: 26). In contemporary times, something is considered authentic when it can create the experience of these origins and traditions, rather than supplying an ‘original’ (Zukin 2010:3). Interestingly,
authenticity and community are linked in this ‘originary’ sense. Husserl's notion of authenticity grew out of a sense of operating as a community, through the shared experience of communication symbols and social acts (Bessant 2011: 8). Tönnies’ theory of community (Gemeinschaft) “harkens back to a primordially rural (village) way of life based on close, personal relations” (ibid: 26). According to Martin Heidegger, “authentic existence involves choosing to take responsibility for one's own existence” and involves an intimate linkage between one’s own authentic self and authentic communities through building a common life and acting together toward a common good (Bessant 2011: 5, 26). And for Heidegger, a community becomes “authentic” when people work together to revitalize and reappropriate its heritage (ibid: 20). This “desire for authentic origins - a traditional, mythical desire for roots” along with the co-created new beginnings creates a continuous reinvention of communities (Zukin 2010: 2).

The ‘new middle class’ as a community, then, typically “defends a life-world that is at the same time traditional and modern” […] with access to the world of the artisan and the peasant, “to the forms of solidarity of an (idealized) working class as well as to forms of communicative association of an (idealized) bourgeois class” (Eder 1993: 148). As individuals, New Organic Farmers take responsibility to create a community for themselves that is authentic and meaningful to them, by bridging and melding dichotomous life-worlds and representing “both origins and new beginnings” (Zukin 2010: 22). This framework will inform my analysis by helping to illustrate the ways New Organic Farmers are part of the ‘new middle class’, how the elements within this identity (opposition, performance, authenticity) creates mainstream cachet through the local food movement and its ‘authentic’ communities. I close by explaining the implications of this on the wider public and food system in general.
2.7 The Farmers

The bulk of my fieldwork was completed at Galaxy Farm. There are two main farmers, Jim and Kirk, who have been business partners for six years. “Jim” is a university graduate who grew up in suburban Toronto. His mother worked in insurance services and father was a government employee. The second, “Kirk,” grew up in suburban Saskatoon with a stay-at-home mother and a father practicing criminal law. Kirk is a doctorate degree holder and enjoyed a short career as a sessional university professor before deciding to begin farming. His wife is from suburban Vancouver and holds a Master’s degree. Their hired farm hands this year were a Master’s candidate from suburban Vancouver (myself), a photographer and artist with a Bachelor of Arts also from suburban Vancouver, and a graphic designer from Kelowna with a Master’s degree.

I interviewed a husband and wife team, Alan and Delilah, who run “Glacier Farm” two hours north of Vancouver. They met in university when Alan completed a Bachelor of Arts in English and Delilah a Bachelor of Science in Land and Food Systems. Throughout their university career, they planted trees, eventually becoming managers and foremen of the operation.

At “Fresh Air Farm” also two hours north of Vancouver, I interviewed two of three business partners. One partner, Fiona, completed a Bachelor of Science in Biology and worked for ten years in outdoor education before deciding to farm. After travelling extensively, Frieda completed a nutrition diploma in Vancouver and worked as a nutritional consultant as well as for a food-related non-profit organization before coming to farming.

I interviewed two of six farmers at “Uniform Farm”. This is an unusual farm in that it is located in an urban area and is financially able to hire six farmhands per year because of its support from a local university. Unlike these other farms, the farmers at Uniform Farm have not invested personal finances to buy or lease the land they farm. The first interviewee,
George, went to a community college and got a degree in web design and computer programming and went on to own a web-design business. Later, George completed a Bachelor of Science in Land and Food Systems while farming. The second interviewee, Scarlet, had just completed a Bachelor of Science in Land and Food Systems while working at Uniform Farm.

Darlene, the farmer at “Peach-Pear Farm” is a part-time organic farmer. She has a Bachelor of Science in Biology, a Master of Environmental Education and extensive work experience with teaching English and environmental education in Canada and abroad, as well as being an active volunteer for food-related non-profit organizations. She has a full time job at a major institution focused on climate change initiatives. Darlene leased land an hour from Vancouver and farmed it on the weekends from spring through to the fall of 2011.

### Table 1: New Organic Farmers in this Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farm Name</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Hometown</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Farming Experience to Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Galaxy Farm</td>
<td>mid-30’s</td>
<td>Saskatoon; Toronto; suburban</td>
<td>PhD; BSc; BA; MA candidate; MA</td>
<td>3 male; 2 female</td>
<td>6 years; 2 years; 1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vancouver; Kelowna</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glacier Farm</td>
<td>Early 30’s</td>
<td>Vancouver and Rock Creek BC; Kamloops BC</td>
<td>BSc; BA</td>
<td>1 male; 1 female</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh Air Farm</td>
<td>Early and mid-30’s</td>
<td>Suburban Sydney Australia; small town Ontario</td>
<td>Nutrition Diploma; BSc</td>
<td>2 female</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniform Farm</td>
<td>mid 20’s</td>
<td>Small town Michigan; New Denver BC and Victoria</td>
<td>Two BSc’s; BSc</td>
<td>male; female</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peach Pear Farm</td>
<td>Late 20’s</td>
<td>Montreal and Ottawa</td>
<td>BA, MEd</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3 Authentic Connection to the Land

“It’s about being close to nature […] there’s something within us all that wants to be connected to that which is greater.”
~Fresh Air Farm

3.1 A “Lived” Connection to Land

I was always tired after the workday at Galaxy Farm. Yet, I got a great deal of satisfaction at the end of the day, watching the sun’s angle light up the fields and the nearby Black Cottonwood grove with a lustrous golden hue. It was at these times I noticed new blackberry blossoms, an extended family of Black-headed Grosbeak birds flitting about, or the southwesterly winds smelling sweetly of the river and cottonwood sap. During my fieldwork, I did not hear the word ‘authenticity’ used by my informants, but I chose to bring this notion into my ethnography because there were many pervasive examples of both words and actions illustrating an essence of “connection”. Academic writing has described this “connection” as, “the sensual material embodiment of ecology and craft” that bring satisfaction to farming (Starr 487: 2010). “An authentic experience,” achieved in daily life, “is one in which individuals feel themselves to be in touch both with a 'real' world and with their 'real' selves” (Handler and Saxton 1988: 243). New Organic Farmers described how the beauty and majesty of their natural surroundings seemed to come through connection with land itself, on a daily basis. At Glacier Farm, Alan described how he

“is intrinsically connected to the land [through farming…]. Connecting, totally, in a really basic way […]. The most valuable moments I have had walking through the field at dusk, I notice this or that, I see things, you are just relaxed and you are taking your time walking through your fields. And it’s kind of really nice and aesthetic and peaceful”.

And Delilah concurs, “It’s just enjoyable and inspiring to be having it happen and be a part of it.” On Fresh Air Farm, Frieda described farming and her connection to land as a spiritual experience for her, which meant “being close to nature and as much as we are

cultivating nature, you are often out of the craziness of the cities we’ve created.” Scarlet, at Uniform Farm, characterized her relationship to plants, soil and weather as an “intimate experience” that came through connecting with the land at early age.

In a similar way, the food itself, grown in a place where a farmer experiences a connection with nature, is a very highly valued commodity. Both Kirk and Jim explained the high quality and beauty of the food grown on the land is what began and continues to inspire their interest in organic farming: “Just eating it. I enjoy eating it. You know, taste and health. Growing it you save a lot of money. You could get this food at the [Farmer’s] market, but you have to work at a good paying job to eat the way I would eat [every day]”.

In August, the final month of my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to eat dinner at Bishop’s, a high-end restaurant in an expensive neighbourhood of Vancouver. I was immediately struck by a painful recognition of the items on the menu, after working at Galaxy Farm. All of the greens on the menu came from our “sister” farm, whose salads we had sampled regularly; the pork dish came from a farmer whom I saw each week as a fellow vendor at the Farmer’s Market; most surprisingly, some of the dishes were garnished with a succulent weed, purslane, that we encountered regularly in the field and pulled out of the soil to let dry up in the afternoon sun. The painful recognition of these common farm commodities being used at a high-end restaurant evoked a feeling of disdain and even ridicule in me, because everyday items were being used to produce a symbol of an “exotic” dining experience and as a status marker. With my “lived” experience on an organic farm, I saw with new clarity the performativity of the middle class in the public realm and how tradition and modernity were being used simultaneously to produce an “authentic” experience. Moreover, as an organic farmhand and a middle class actor, I was contributing to the creation and cachet of this exoticized experience for the ‘new middle class’, and yet by virtue of this found it notable that I felt myself in opposition to other patrons of the restaurant and their servers.
3.2 Hard Work and Challenge Creates Connection

A well-accepted and understood axiom among New Organic Farmers is how much hard work is required for months at a time. As an employee at Galaxy Farm, I worked 50 hours per week, each hour outside in the field doing hard physical labour. As a participant, but also through my interviews, I observed how these intimate and satisfying relationships to the land and the food are deepened through difficult physical or personal challenge offered by farming. George summed this up nicely when he describes summer on the farm: “the summer feels like a never ending day. […] it’s satisfying but also very, very tiring.” Glacier Farm also describes their experiences as very difficult, in a satisfying way:

“We broke the land, we fought the weeds, everything was just difficult. It was just pasture prior to that and it was very weedy. […] yeah the grass was intense. It was in a lower marshy area […] and it was just a struggle. But it was good, it was good to struggle at first. […] last year, there were a lot of days we were working 16 hour days.”

Similarly, at Fresh Air Farm, when Fiona was asked what keeps her inspired, she said it was her connection to the land being deepened by hard work:

“There’s “a connection to how hard we have worked so far. And I feel like the more challenges there are, and the more I overcome those challenges, the more invested I am, the more I’m not tempted to leave. Cus’ you know, just stick with it. If you are learning things and going through things, you want to stick around and feel the reward”.

And, at Galaxy Farm a similar sentiment:

“You have to go out, during the summer you have to work every day. All summer. You can’t take time off in the summer. And in the fall when the weather gets bad, you still have to go out and work. And in the spring when it is cold and wet you still have to go out and work. There’s going to be a lot of time where the weather’s not going to be nice and you are still going to have to go out and work. Or you are tired and you still have to go out and work or you are hurt and you have to work.”

While farming in general promises hard physical labour, organic farming, in particular, requires methods employing manual, human labour for several reasons. Firstly, one of the goals of organic agriculture is to enrich the soil using methods that preserve soil health without the use of synthetic inputs and fertilizers (CAN/CGSB-32.310-2006 5.4 and 1.4.1). Enriching the soil is done through the application of compost and manures and seeding cover
crops in the fall to minimize nutrient loss during the off season due to rainfall, winds or other physical weathering. In the same vein, New Organic Farmers are very aware of how mechanized cultivation of soil, or tractor use causes topsoil loss and destroys soil structure, so they will minimize its use.

Secondly, under the Canadian National Organic Standard farmers cannot use synthetic herbicides (CAN/CGSB-32.310-2006 1.4.1); if they did, they could eliminate much of the need for manual human weeding. Weeding crops took up the bulk of my time at Galaxy Farm, and nearly every day involved weeding a crop and some crops took longer than others. Weeding is important in any farming system because the more nutrients available to desired crops, the more healthy they will be; if unwanted plants (weeds) are abundant and monopolizing nutrients, desired crops suffer significantly. Galaxy Farm grows several thousand feet of onions, a very time intensive crop to weed. Onions grow comparatively slowly and take about four months (February until June) to produce enough of a deep root to withstand soil disturbances. As a result, weeding is a very delicate act, searching for the tender shoots, and then ensuring the bulb is not disrupted too much. One day in May, I recall spending four hours weeding a bed of young onions and covering about 165 feet (the bed was 500 feet long). As an inexperienced weeder, I travelled at a clip of 40 feet per hour.

Thirdly, most small scale organic farms grow a wide variety of crops (over and above twenty different varieties), so creating faster, more mechanized weeding or harvesting methods is usually not financially feasible because one may need twenty different tractor attachments or other mechanized parts. Glacier Farm explicitly describes their farming methods as requiring a lot of manual labour, which is not present in larger scale, single crop farms:

“If you only do salad greens and lettuce then you can mechanize everything. That’s just modern farming. In our case, […] we plan on setting up a system that will take care of itself […]. But
it totally works if you do a broad variety, it’s perfect and it’s an old system that has been around forever.”

This illustrates how a perceived authentic connection to land is deepened by invoking the origins of farming and is based on the virtue of traditional “village” conditions (Bessant 2011: 26). Authenticity here is earned through the exchange of mainstream modern systems for “originary” farming systems, and achieved through the invention of its new beginnings.
4 Authentic Connection to People

“We were open to the needs of the greater community and what can we offer, even though we [didn’t] know how to farm”

~Galaxy Farm

4.1 A “Lived” Connection to Community

Starr argues that “the cosmology of the local food movement is food as community” (2010:484). In other words, community and food production are today seen as intrinsically linked, or woven from the same cloth. Community is built through an individual’s “mutual recognition that they are part of a single social unit” (Melucci 1989: 29). Individual farmers at Galaxy Farm are cultivating a “lived” community amongst themselves through the daily act of farming together, and through connecting with food itself. Galaxy Farm is a cooperatively run farm. The land is cooperatively owned by more than forty-five stakeholders, and is attached to a non-profit organization to ensure the land remains as farmland in perpetuity. The landscape is cooperatively run, as there are five households on the farm, all sharing a water source, grey water disposal and physical proximity: two cabins with single males, a bungalow house with a single woman, a main house with a family of five (two adults, three children under four years), and a suite downstairs with two women (one of which was myself). Lunchtime is a cooperative and communal event, and we ate lunch together six days per week. Each farm resident was responsible for preparing a group lunch on one day each week, leaving the field early and unpaid in order to do so. The lunches needed to incorporate vegetarian options, gluten free and dairy free options to accommodate individual dietary needs. Farm work is also cooperatively shared and delegated. Equipment is shared between nine farm workers on a day-to-day basis, including tractors, farm trucks, hoes and shovels, the washing station, storage bins, knives, barn space, a weed eater, water taps and hoses.

New Organic Farmers at Galaxy Farm also build community with each other around food quality and food sources. I witnessed many conversations highlighting the “interconnectivity between authentic human existence” (or “lived” experiences) and “co-
creation of community” (Bessant 2011: 6). A very common topic of conversation during lunch times was food. For example, late in May a conversation about the concept of local food in Saskatchewan and Idaho emerged. Kirk described how he had attended an event in Saskatchewan promising a local food theme. When he sat down to eat, “it was hamburgers on white buns, [and] Jell-o salad” and he explained that he hadn’t realized the organizer’s definition of local meant food from the local co-op store. Kirk continued, “the notion of farming and being close to the food doesn’t mean anything [there]”. This story prompted another farmer to share an experience:

R: “My cousin worked in Idaho, the potato capital of the States. […] She said nobody eats potatoes in Idaho. They all eat instant potatoes, powdered potatoes”.

Voices from the group: Oh my God! Really? No way.”
R: Yeah. Nobody actually cooks actual potatoes.”
Voices from the group: “So they get shipped out, processed and they shipped back and put in the store?
S - “What are instant potatoes?”
R - “Powdered potato. They are dehydrated.”
S - “It’s all mixed up, like particle board potato?”
R - “It’s like instant gravy.”
J - “It’s like dried flakes of potato and then you put water in it and then it turns into mashed potatoes.
R - “It’s got some kind of oil, probably some spices…”
C - It’s more than just potatoes [Xanthan gum?! Laughing!], it has flavour too! Same idea as stuffing from a box.”
S - “I just don’t think I’ve seen it. [laughing]
C - Well, you’re a better person for it!”
S - “It just seems absurd. [It is!]”
R - “It would be really good fire starter though. [It’s probably an explosive].

This example illustrates how ideological solidarity is communicated and co-created. In this example, it is generally agreed upon that processed food is considered low quality food, and even undesirable. Because “authentic existence involves choosing to take responsibility for one's own existence” (Bessant 2011: 5), this example suggests that this group of individuals creates community by striving for an alternative to low quality food by growing food oneself and creating one’s own markets for this food. In addition, it again highlights the notion of opposition acted upon by the middle class using a caricature of other farming regions.
and chastising them for the inappropriate food ethics and aesthetics, which serves to solidify the sense of community among the farmers around the lunch table. It became even clearer how this oppositional identity to others with differing values of food works to build a sense of community when two farmers at Galaxy Farm, on three different occasions, ate fast food for dinner, food that is typically considered “low quality”. These two farmers were going on a “food tour” of Kentucky Fried Chicken, Wendy’s and Dairy Queen to see what their featured burgers tasted like. When asked about the experience, one farmer replied, “it wasn’t really exotic as you might think”.

4.2 Connecting to the “Public” Community

Small-scale organic farming relies on supplying local customers with high quality fruits and vegetables, rather than supplying large-scale supermarket chains, or even small specialty produce stores in urban centres. Most of the operations I observed are small enough that it is financially unfeasible to sell to a larger market. As such, there are two main methods for New Organic Farmers to get foods to their customers: Community Supported Agriculture and Farmer’s Markets. Community Supported Agriculture, known among farmers as “CSA’s” is a system where community members purchase a “share” of the farmer’s produce, up front in the Springtime, a cost which ranges from $400-$600. This up-front payment helps with farmer’s season start-up costs, such as seed purchases, compost purchases and other equipment needs. In return, the customer will receive a weekly box of produce delivered through the summer and fall months to a particular location for pick up. The customer is warned in advance the contents of the box varies weekly and seasonally, and that the contents will depend on what is in abundance at a certain time of year, or what the weather that season allows for. Similarly, buying a share of the farmer’s produce also demonstrates an understanding that if a certain crop fails, the customer is taking on the risk with the farmer. At Galaxy Farm, we worked each week to pack seventy-five CSA boxes per week and had them
delivered to a central depot in Vancouver so that urban customers could receive their share. In early June, the boxes contained only a few items: rhubarb, kale, collard greens and spinach. In late August, the box was difficult to close up as it contained so much: lettuce, fennel bulb, swiss chard, kale, carrots, beets, zucchini, summer squashes, garlic, onions, leeks, cabbage, and potatoes. At Glacier Farm, they use the CSA model because they wanted to sell to neighbours and “that feels more legitimate”. At Fresh Air Farm, they use the CSA model and like it because it creates local connections in their region around food:

“And I think we will keep a diverse marketing strategy for the years to come. It would be nice to be more local and the idea of CSA’s where there is more connection. I like the idea of people having farmers. Like ‘oh, so-and-so is my farmer’. The idea of that and really this piece of land, our efforts feed a certain number of people.”

Farmer’s Markets are another strategy for selling food locally, but is often less “local” than a CSA, because it involves a lot of travel, valuable time and resources for farmers. At Galaxy Farm, the produce was taken to four markets each week from May until October, and attended by one of the farmers or farmhands. Even though each market was under an hour drive from the farm, they still involved huge amount of time and labour. Even the closest market lasting four hours and only a half an hour drive away, involved eight hours of labour. It takes time to pack up the truck (longer in the summer months when there is more produce to pack), time to unload the truck and set up the stall at the market site, participate in the market and then do it all again in reverse.

Despite the huge amount of time and resources involved with attending a Farmer’s Market, these markets are important to reach a different audience from a CSA, because farmers have a chance to meet and get to know the customers that support local food and for customers to meet “their” farmers. Kirk recognized that Farmer’s Markets are a “where most of the community comes from”. Jim at Galaxy Farm said,

“The market too, it’s enjoyable. […] you get to be there along the whole chain, right from growing it to selling it, to the person who is going to use it. Rather than growing it and selling it to a
wholesaler or even through a [CSA] box, we don’t even see the customer a lot of the time. […] Whenever someone comes up to the stand I can see what they are buying, they can tell me what they like. By seeing the same people come back each week, you know that they are enjoying what they are getting and that they like it. “

I attended a Farmer’s Market on a bi-weekly basis, as a vendor. Even being there every other week, I developed relationships with certain customers and always had interesting discussions with people about organic food, as we were the only organic vegetable stall at the market. There were very regular customers that I saw each week. One woman I saw each week bought upwards of $50 every market and we talked often about ways to prepare food and use the vegetables she was buying; in particular, we discussed how to preserve cucumbers (or make pickles) using a fermentation method. It was something she had not tried before, but she knew it was a more nutritious method of preservation. I had a recipe, so we exchanged email addresses to discuss further without the bustle of the market. I made sure she got a big bundle of dill flowers, free of charge, for her pickles, as this is an essential recipe ingredient. From the give and take of these relationships at the market, I certainly felt a sense of responsibility to our customers and took an interest in their needs.
5 Relationships and Self-Reliance

“Farmer’s Markets put that power of controlling food, back into the people’s hands, and it takes it away from the corporations. And that’s where it should be.”

~Glacier Farm

5.1 Self Reliance

Despite the clear emphasis on community among New Organic Farmers and their customers, a clear theme of self-reliance and independence emerged from my fieldwork. Firstly, all of the New Organic Farmers I interviewed are self-employed and must rely on their personal and physical abilities to make a living. The farmers at Glacier Farm described owning their own business as better than “working for the man”. Similarly, Jim at Galaxy Farm said that running his own business was one of the very appealing aspects that influenced his decision to join the farm. As such, he recognized the importance of how work ethic directly influences his income: “Because if you don’t [work], every hour, every day that is potentially food that you are not growing. So I think work ethic is a big one…”

Secondly, the importance of self-reliance is also evident from New Organic Farmers’ choices around their own food that they eat on a daily basis. Galaxy Farm grows more than fifty different kinds of vegetables and fruits and manages three hundred chickens for organic egg production. As farmhands, we could eat anything we wanted from the farm, if we harvested it ourselves. In addition, there were always “seconds” available as “Farmer Food”. Farmer Food consisted of cracked eggs (usually hairline cracks), nicked or bruised vegetables, undersized vegetables or those with strange shapes – items that customers would likely pass over, due to physical appearance. One farmer grew grain (quinoa) on a patch of land designated for personal use, and Kirk and his family managed five milk goats, which provided the entirety of their daily needs, including milk, cheeses and cheese spreads. Bulk quantities of supplementary organic items, such as grains (oatmeal and rice), flours and other food staples were purchased for the farm and each household or individual would buy a share of these
amenities as needed. With such an abundance of foods available at the farm where we lived, there was a significantly reduced need to purchase food at stores.

The first community lunch I ate at Galaxy Farm, prepared by Jim, consisted of chicken soup, made from a chicken slaughtered the previous fall, last season’s shallots and carrots, and a few spices. In the middle of the table was a stack of mizuna and arugula (spicy greens) stalks that had gone to seed. They were to be used as salad, in whichever way one could manage to eat it without getting too much oil and vinegar spilled. For dessert, we had baked pears, preserved from last summer with walnuts from a farmer in the Okanagan region, four hours from Vancouver. This was a silent, but clear communication that Jim was using food that he had himself produced. It was a lovely meal and while eating it I remembered it would soon be my turn to return the favour of cooking lunch. Only upon reflection after leaving the farm, I see now that using Farmer Food regularly is action towards self-reliance and in opposition to the conventional system the New Organic Farmer is working to transform.

5.2 Opposition to Conventional Farming

Paradoxically, the kind of self-reliance lived out by New Organic Farmers serves to underscore the importance of community and interconnection when it is juxtaposed with their resistance to a larger, corporate and more mainstream food system. DuPuis points out that local food production is “a counter-hegemony to this globalization [or agribusiness] thesis, a call to action under the claim that the counter to global power is local power” (2005: 361). And similarly, “an oligarchy ruled by a handful of multi-national corporations—the obvious tendency in the agro-food system that dominates at present—does not engender much hope for achieving sustainability. Food democracy seeks to expose and challenge the anti-democratic forces of control, and claims the rights and responsibilities of citizens to participate in decision-making” (Hassenein 2003:83). The actions taken by a New Organic Farmer, by farming on a small scale and distributing produce to local markets and
communities, is done to actively withdraw support from the agribusiness system and to demonstrate the possibilities, and even richness of other systems. A comment from a farmer at Glacier Farm says:

“It seems to me the average people, like the common people have had their ownership of their food production taken away. And now it’s in the hands of these massive corporate farms. Then there’s this backlash where these people are saying, ‘No, to hell with that. We should be in charge of our food, we should be in charge of everything’.

An important means for describing the New Organic Farmer identity is narrating their position in opposition to agribusiness and conventional farming. Galaxy Farm is located in the Fraser Valley of BC. This region is considered one of the “most intensively and diversely farmed areas in Canada”; agriculture “is the economic mainstay of the community, generating gross farm receipts in the range of $558 million, annually” (Zbeetnoff Consulting 2009). After exiting Highway 1, the road to Galaxy Farm winds through many large conventional farms, including vast fields of corn, hay, cranberries, blueberries and dairies. To the east of Galaxy Farm, a large conventional hay farm extends out, and to the west, a large-scale corn farm continues to the horizon. Through my fieldwork, I observed that the New Organic Farmers did not interact with these close farm neighbours. When asked about their relationship to the neighbouring farmers, Kirk stated,

“A lot of the community that exists in the agricultural community is there not so much for the agriculture but because they all go to the same church, that’s the big one… there isn’t really a strong interconnected [local] agricultural community in general that we are part of…so the markets are…really where most of the community comes from. You have a lot more contact with these farms from all over the place than you do with that you do with the people who live down the road from you.

Despite the scarcity of interaction with conventional farmers, New Organic Farmers had a lot to say about this group. They define themselves in opposition to conventional farmers in terms of method and lifestyle, and also reinforce aspects of their identity based upon their connection to food and the land it was grown on. Using phrases and words that
emerged from my interview transcriptions, I summarized the oppositional qualities between these two groups in Table 2.

**Table 2: Conventional vs. Organic Farmers as Described by New Organic Farmers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conventional Farming</th>
<th>Organic Farming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commodity farming/agriculture</td>
<td>Growing food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soybeans, corn, grain, pork, dairy, monocropping</td>
<td>Mixed vegetables (kale, chard), “direct food”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventional, crop dusters, spray, agrochemicals, input driven</td>
<td>Organic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Farmer’s Markets, a food chain of inputs</td>
<td>Farmer’s Markets, local marketing, CSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huge farms/large-scale</td>
<td>Small scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own equipment supplier businesses</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running the Marketing board (quota)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production, production, production</td>
<td>Stewarding the land, caring for the land, habitat preservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old boys club/male dominated</td>
<td>Mostly women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple generations, large agricultural family</td>
<td>City dwellers, no previous experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not passionate about good food</td>
<td>Passionate about good food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unconnected to their food</td>
<td>Connected to their food, “direct food”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling nature</td>
<td>Gambling, “roll the dice”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tractor Use, machinery, washing equip.</td>
<td>Struggle, back breaking work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3 The Future of Conventional Farming

Nearly all of the New Organic Farmers I interviewed and worked with recognized and were skeptical of the connections between the corporate farming sector and larger global systems of which it is a part, including rising global oil prices, capitalist economies and recent economic collapses reaching many corners of the world. George describes this candidly,

“I see the reason for all of this [farming, new farmers] is, the...impending [societal] collapse. I think people feel it, I think people are preparing for it, whether we know it consciously or not...which is kind of crazy, [...] I mean for me, the self-reliance thing, we maybe didn’t get into it enough with what we have talked about, but that’s why I do it [farm].”

Jim described himself in opposition to a “New World Order”. He defined the New World Order as a small, elite class of very rich people who are determining how the world is run and how food around the world is produced. Jim believes that, by small scale farming, he is “counter to that New World Order” by “putting food, clean healthy food, and taking it out of the hands of large corporations and putting it in the hands of individuals like myself.”
While not all farmers so clearly defined the system they felt up against, most others believed that farming organically, on a small scale, is going to become a necessity, rather than a luxury in the near future. For example, at Fresh Air Farm, Frieda stated,

“Maybe I’m all starry eyed, but I think eventually we are going to have to turn to small-scale, local agriculture […] I don’t mean to be dire, but there will be people - not that have to - but [who] will think more about it, because of those oil prices […] the regular food supply will actually become more expensive too.”

Here, she is recognizing that today her vegetables cost more money than other produce in supermarkets; however, she believes that food prices in supermarkets will eventually become so expensive that buying local vegetables from local farmers will on par with supermarket prices. Similarly, Alan at Glacier Farm passionately asserted:

“[The] cost to produce food the way factory [conventional] farms do it now is going to make it unviable. It’s not going to be viable for the long term […]. There’s bigger forces at play. The way they are doing it strictly input driven. The only reason [conventional farmers] can grow all those crops is because they use fertilizer that is made from mostly natural gas. As we run out of that, and as fuel prices go up, there is so much erosion, seed problems, there’s just endless problems with the way factory farms operate, it’s just not going to be viable anymore. It’s going to fall apart, and then who’s going to grow the food? It’s doesn’t matter if it’s a fad or not at that point, it’s just whoever has the knowhow and can do it.”

Like Alan, George feels that learning to farm now will serve him very well in the future when the society collapses:

“It’s great now that we are using it as a job and a mode of economy, of economic exchange but eventually farming will be more as it was in the past, a necessity, not a choice. So it was kind of taking advantage of these opportunities to gain the skills when it was a choice so that, it wasn’t that you aren’t stuck up against a wall, not being able to feed yourself [my emphasis]”.

New Organic Farmers are seeking self-reliance in their lifestyles, which relies on their independent business sense and their physical abilities to make a living, and involves actively positioning themselves against conventional farming and agribusiness. When this ideal of self-reliance is taken alongside their demonstrated connection to their communities, it is clear this opposition serves to further define their community, rather than simply alienating themselves. The “‘highest form of community’ is one in which each individual acts as a free person, while taking responsibility for herself or himself and for the larger community,” and highlights the
important relationship between personal freedoms and collective action (MacIntyre 2006: 129). By rejecting conventional farming and a global food system, New Organic Farmers demonstrate their interest in building communities who can rely on each other and share in responsibility to meet a basic human need, to eat.
6 Farming as Livelihood

“We are continually defining ourselves in the course of everyday living.”
~Kenneth Bessant on Martin Heidegger, 2011

6.1 New Organic Farmers as Educators

Their opposition to conventional farming and global systems helps to place New Organic Farmers and their work in the spotlight because of the benefits of organic farming for the environment and society (COABC 2010; Allen, 2000). An important aspect of New Organic Farmer identity is the interaction with the public realm, because ultimately, it is the relationship to public audience that determines the reputation and popularity of local food and farming, and consequently the ability to make a living. There is an important connection between the narration of the experience of organic, local farming by New Organic Farmers and the demonstrated public interest in understanding this experience. This narration of experience is told through various mediums I observed in my field work, including Farmer’s Markets, on-farm tours, farmers teaching classes in university, public talks and museum exhibits.

Today, “farmers are [seen as] active teachers” (Starr 2010:484), and build a “public” solidarity with the wider community through education about local food and teaching the notion of preserving the past, or accessing farming’s ‘originary condition’. On Glacier Farm and Uniform Farm, the farmers hire workers each year who are new to farming because they value the opportunity to share information with aspiring farmers and learn together. Similarly, Galaxy Farm considers an important feature of their farm to be educating New Organic Farmers each year by bringing them on as farmhands. In his interview, Kirk told me:

“One year, the loss of a seed, or one generation, the loss of all this information about how to grow food and how to preserve it is huge […]. We saw in what we were mentored in, as important to continue to pass along or to continue to make available to other people, so we’ve tried to do that in terms of how we have hired people for the summer. […] you just have to do [farming activities] to keep them alive, whether that is preserving food and making that part of the farm lifestyle and farm living, or experimenting with native crops, or whatever those might be, just to keep that knowledge alive. […] knowing it, practicing it, […] and then teaching other people who are interested”.
In addition to on-farm training, Kirk often gives educational farm tours to university classes and public groups through the summer to build an awareness of local food issues. On several occasions through the summer, I would walk up the long pathway from the field to the main farm area for lunch, and be greeted by a group of ten or more students, dressed in clean clothes and full of energy. Through the month of October each year, Kirk teaches a module at the Farm School of a local university on farm bookkeeping.

At Fresh Air Farm, Frieda and Fiona see the Farmer’s Markets as an opportunity for information sharing because it is a public place to showcase the local food available in her region. They stated as a result of their presence in their region, “people are learning more about how to get locally produced food.” And,

“I think there’s people showing up at Farmers Markets who wouldn’t necessarily have been there 5 to 10 years ago. 5 years ago, 2 even. […] And maybe those people will go on to get more educated and realize that, ‘Oh, this is what’s going on with this movement’, as opposed to it just being a fad for fad’s sake. There would be people [at the market] that had never had something or other before. We had a student here who had never had a beet before.”

Glacier Farm shared a similar sentiment when describing how Farmer’s Markets educate public perceptions of food in general, but also of the farmers themselves. Alan referred to a friend who had openly underestimated the hard work involved with farming:

A: “We were talking, and he was saying, ‘Man, what you guys are doing must be so easy, you just go out and put some seed in the ground and then you go hang out in your hammock […]’. I told him what was up. And now he sees it going on.”

D: “You just have to educate people, Farmer’s Markets are good for that. People like him don’t go to Farmer’s Markets though.”

A: “Articles in the New York Times are good for [the rest]. Movies and all that sort of stuff. There’s so many things in art and culture that you see. I was watching an episode of Curb Your Enthusiasm, and they go to the Farmer’s Market. And it’s not like a focal point, it’s just the setting for that one scene or whatever. And all of the sudden, the Farmer’s Market is on TV.

6.2 New Organic Farmers as “The Antidote”

In January 2011, Will Allen, Farmer and CEO of the non-profit Growing Power, visited Vancouver and gave a talk about farming to a crowd of 700 people. Before coming to farming, Will Allen grew up on a cotton farm, and later pursued successful careers in
professional basketball and corporate marketing. Today, Allen is known as an innovative farmer bringing healthy, affordable food to urban areas and was recognized in 2008 for his contributions in this area with a MacArthur Genius Fellowship. This was an award received also by doctors, astrophysicists and neuroscientists that year. I bring in Allen’s talk at this juncture to illustrate the ways in which farm education occurs in the “public” realm, how it is lauded by (a largely middle class) public and what implications this has for the identity of New Organic Farmers.

Allen’s entire speech was essentially a call to action asking the audience to “commit to growing food”, to support farmers, “the local economy” and “locally grown food” because this form of agriculture is a “connector between all people” (Allen 2011). Through photomontage, Allen narrated stories about how his urban farms have helped people who can’t read or write find direction in their lives. His farms have helped Native Americans with diabetes cultivate a better diet, and taught “juvenile delinquents” positive life skills (Allen 2011). He works with and teaches children and youth, people with disabilities and immigrant farmers. He described how some of his urban farms have moved onto vacant lots previously occupied by drug dealers. He described how “we need everyone at the table”, including even the “Walmart gang” because they are now selling organic food (Allen 2011). He has been involved with food projects in Mississippi, Kentucky, Arkansas, Georgia, Virginia, New York, Minnesota, Michigan, Kenya, Ukraine and London, England. He has spoken at Yale and Princeton universities, and at the talk he emphasized their willingness to embrace the “good food movement”. Interestingly, Allen did not include ‘educated’ or ‘new middle class’ people in his description of who he works with, the implication being that this group’s involvement perhaps goes without saying. With the breadth of actors mentioned, Allen suggests that sharing and teaching local, sustainable agriculture can build a community across all cultures, creeds and ages and has the ability to transcend difference and social inequality, even suggesting that “it
could end wars […] and reduce crime” (Allen 2011). He even includes Walmart in his community, which in many ways epitomizes the large corporate structure that New Organic Farmers oppose.

Allen describes farming in a way that includes this vast myriad of people into a “single social unit” built upon local food production, which is a very different image than the community solidarity, or even description of New Organic Farmers that I witnessed through my fieldwork. While community is present in many ways at Galaxy Farm and the farming experience narrated by Allen, the membership within the communities greatly differs. At Allen’s talk, the experience of farming as an inclusive, profound and barrier-free profession is made available to all through a descriptive performance, ostensibly free from class structures and constraints. While the act of growing food could arguably be “truly” communal and available to all, gaining access to it is not. Through my fieldwork at Galaxy Farm, I observed how regular shipments of compost were purchased and trucked in to maintain even the Class 1⁴ agricultural soil on this farmland; access to adequate soil with the ability to yield a range of desirable crops is paramount to the success of growing food. Seed purchases are an annual expense, which at Galaxy Farm are several hundred dollars each year. Moreover, the infrastructure and maintenance costs of growing food include hand tools and tractors (as well as fuel to run the tractors), an irrigation system and a processing station for washing and bunching vegetables, just to name a few. The point here is, that food production has substantial costs involved, a reality often hidden by the virtues of self-reliance. This gloss over class dynamics in the public representation of farming suggests the salience of performativity here, but simultaneously suggests the sincere faith in and desire for the cultivation of local

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⁴ “Class 1 land is capable of producing the very widest range of crops. Soil and climate conditions are optimum, resulting in easy management…As the class numbers increase from Class 1 to Class 7, the range of crops decreases” (Provincial Agricultural Land Commission 2012).
agriculture to create class changes within our society. It speaks to the balancing act between oppositions within the identity of the ‘new middle class’.

“The domain of art and culture”, in this case the museum, is a site of consumption and secular education, generally appealing to the ‘new middle class’ (Bourdieu 1977: 197; Graburn 1998:13; Zukin 2004: 182). Zukin argues that concepts of identity and consumption converge in the classification of valuable goods and experiences (2004: 181). It follows that my next example is from a recent exhibit at the Museum of Vancouver called Home Grown: Local Sustainable Food. This exhibition, on display from August 2010 to January 2011, featured farm photography from Southwestern BC by a local photographer, as well as objects donated by local farmers. These objects included used hats, well-worn boots and shoes, a wall of preserved foods, rain barrels and more. The photos in the exhibit were arranged in concert with quotations painted on the walls from famous ecologists, First Nations leaders, Roman emperors, philosophers and local organic farmers. Galaxy Farm was featured in three photographs and a quotation from one of the farmers was included on the walls⁵. Like the

Will Allen talk, support for this exhibit came from various channels, both corporate and government: the City of Vancouver, the Vancouver International Airport, the Georgia Straight

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⁵ All photographs depict objects and photos featured in the MOV exhibition, and were taken by the author.
newspaper and a handful of corporate food sponsors, signaling that this experience had been vetted by influential voices within Vancouver. Institutions, such as museums, constitute collective thought as much as they express it, suggesting local farming is now ‘authorized’ as being desirable and valuable to the public (Bourdieu 1977: 167; Zukin 2004:181).

The “public” identity of the New Organic Farmer was narrated throughout the entire exhibit, particularly because the exhibition was in a museum, an institution whose primary objective is to teach and educate the public, and again suggests the role of education being linked with farming (Graburn 1998: 13). The value of what is being ‘taught’ at the museum also assumes a moral value associated with local, sustainable food and particularly with revitalizing the heritage of local food. The opening plate in the exhibit reads: “Restoring balance in agriculture and in our food systems will happen when we return to farming and food consumption practices that are deeply informed by mutual renewal” (MOV 2010, my emphasis). The exhibit provides several instructional elements: an egg collecting basket artifact and an accompanying caption: “Urban agriculture transforms the city into a place of production not just consumption”; a compost bucket accompanied by “Compost Makes Fertile Soil”; a rain barrel accompanied by “Water Your Garden With Rain”; and a plate reading “sustainable agriculture contributes to preservation of habitat and biodiversity”. On the way out of the exhibit, visitors are invited to take home a packet of seeds to act on their new knowledge and to learn how to grow food locally. I took away a packet of ‘Festival’ squash seed. Through this seemingly small gesture of a seed packet, the MOV, like Will Allen, requested a call to action from its guests by providing a tangible way to further educate themselves.

The representation of growing food being as socially inclusive was also a feature to the identity of the New Organic Farmer in the MOV exhibition. The exhibit was full of photographs of rural farmers in action doing “traditional farmer” jobs, noting seed plantings,
measuring rows with string, milking goats, slaughtering chickens and selling produce at Farmer’s Markets. Alongside these photos were photographs of urban front yards full of produce, a story and photographs of an immigrant “farmer”, Ennio from Italy, among several other elderly characters. A more “modern” feature of the exhibit included a photo of ‘binners’ of Asian descent returning cans, on Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, a community famous for its poor health, high drug addiction and homeless people. In addition, there was a photo of a haggard figure outside the Hastings Folk Garden, also on the Downtown Eastside, with a caption saying: “Hastings Folk Garden, […] is a community garden on Hastings Street. Gardeners live locally in single-room occupancy hotels. They are clients of the Onsite detox program and recipients of meals and clothing from the Salvation Army” (MOV 2010). This depiction suggests that involvement in local, sustainable farming is not limited by any social barrier or background, despite the contradictions to this representation in the “lived” identities I observed ethnographically.

The narration of the “public” identity of the New Organic Farmer continues with illustrating how they act in opposition to conventional farming. The main image used on the flyers and advertisements for the exhibit features a photograph of a protest that took place outside the parliament buildings in Victoria, BC. Within the exhibit itself, local sustainable farmers are positioned in opposition to conventional farming, and it is done in a fairly dramatic fashion. One of the leading plates reads:
“Growing food at home: we lose control of food when we ourselves do not grow it. One part of the antidote to globalization and corporate farming is the small sustainable farm and garden plot. It reclaims the soil and seed […]. We need more growers, not fewer.”

And another:

“Home Grown is about restoring balance and justice within our local food system. This exhibition brings home the work done by farmers, urban growers, organizations, and many of us in our local communities. Our survival depends upon an enduring and meaningful transformation. Like every good farmer, the ladybug protects the grain, our food and the seeds of life.”

Based on the fieldwork on farms I have completed to date, farmers do see their actions as oppositional to agribusiness and industrial farming, however, none of the New Organic Farmers self-identified as being the “antidote to globalization”. They very well may be an antidote to globalization, and I do not wish to dispute their potential impacts at this time. What I am illustrating is the different presentations of the “lived” and “public” identity of the New Organic Farmer. The high praise from the museum tells us what great value New Organic Farmers have, but also about the growing expectations of these farmers in the eyes of the urban, largely middle class public.

The exhibit also suggests that the intended audience is people who are unfamiliar with these objects and concepts as everyday realities, or people who may not yet be growing their own food. As I walked throughout the exhibit, I experienced frustration, disdain and shock. The photographs and objects I viewed, hats, boots, wheelbarrows, preserves, etc. are items for everyday use on the farm, but have been taken out of context, and were being consumed as exotic items. My emotional response was a clear example of the ways in which performativity of class - an unconscious display of cultural capital emerging from internalized class origins - may be going unnoticed or questioned as we build the strength of the local organic food movement.
7 Conclusions: Where Are We Going?

Regional, small-scale farming, performed with organic methods is part of a new social movement in the 21st century and the New Organic Farmer has a centralized role in this movement (Starr 2010, DeLind 2010, Hassenein 2003: 83; Melucci 1989). The New Organic Farmer identity is built upon a connection to the land and local “lived” communities, an opposition to conventional agriculture and educating the public. New Organic Farmers build communities with other people who share their values of farming and connecting with nature – at the farm and at the markets with customers and fellow farmers – but at the same time value self-reliance. New Organic Farmers pit themselves against big agribusiness both in ideology and in action, refusing large scale, single-crop farms and the technological advances of synthetic pesticide use, preferring ‘traditional’ modes of working the land. As a segment of the ‘new middle class’, New Organic Farmers create meaning through opposition to others (namely conventional farmers) and balancing their own contradictions between the oppositional categories of the peasant and the artisan in order to create community (Eder 1993: 148).

The currency of community then, which also seemingly involves defining who cannot be included, provides a conceptual link New Organic Farmers and their public audience and customers. The public representations of New Organic Farmers demonstrated by Allen and the MOV glossed the farming community as classless and without social barriers, inherently including the ‘new middle class’, and seeking to include the young and old, the rich and the poor, urban and rural, local and immigrant; however, this vast community generally does not include conventional farmers for their assumed inability to appreciate the aesthetic of farming, which excludes their neighbours down the road. Can we afford to exclude farmers who still generate the lion’s share of the food we eat? The construction of community, which
demonstrates openness to everyone, regardless of social status, who shares certain farming values but blocks out others with a perceived difference in these values, is problematic. First, while noble and sincere, the gloss that lumps together ‘binners’ in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, and a middle class farmer with post-graduate education hides practical barriers to eating and growing local, organic food, (in the long and short run) for people without many resources. It highlights performativity of class origins among New Organic Farmers or internalized class origins and illuminates how individuals use this to enact authenticity (Bessant 2003:51). While unintentional, this gloss gives the community only a perceived inclusivity, or an inclusivity without depth, and which may slow any work aspiring to include more urban dwellers facing poverty in farming projects or even municipal support.

Second, the currency of organic, local farming as a wildly inclusive community is a tremendous marketing tool - but for how long? One of my initial questions in beginning this thesis was to ask how to make the local food movement last. The importance of a certain aesthetic (farming practice, food eaten) and the invaluable service organic farming provides to the natural environment is an important element to its public support. While there will always be the organic farmers serving their local areas, the widespread public support of The New York Times, documentary film makers, and universities may not always be in the forefront as it is now. What will New Organic Farmers rely on to maintain the sales they need if the mainstream support shifts?

I would argue that New Organic Farmers, as well as conventional farmers need to rely on each other, as people who grow food. I am suggesting that this division between the two groups and assumed superiority (though in many environmental ways justified) may not serve in the long run, when the going gets tougher - and when the organic farmers’ bodies get sorer. By no means am I suggesting that organic farmers should use more synthetic chemicals, or compromise their values that they hold so dear. I am suggesting that we draw attention to our
conceptualizations of the farming community, with regard to the performance and the creation of ‘authentic’ communities, in order to build on success of the local food movement. Many farmers and customers value the community, the environmental benefits and the social contributions of locally grown food. My sincerest hope is that our farmers can find a way, together, to relate and make lasting changes to our food system that will benefit us all.
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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Life History
- Where are you from/where did you grow up?
- Describe any practical farm schooling that you have completed to date.
- Describe the series of experiences/emotions/ideas that lead you to living and working on your farm.
- What was the pivotal experience that led to farming for you?
- What do/did your parents do for a living? Where do they live?
- What is their relationship to food?
- What did your grandparents do for a living? Where do they live?
- What is their relationship to food?

Lifestyle
- Describe your relationship to food, growing, eating, preparing, preserving.
- Describe what inspires you about farming.
- How would you describe farming to a layperson?
- What makes a ‘good’ farmer?
- Describe the positive things farming brings to your lifestyle.
- Describe the challenging things farming brings to your lifestyle or things about you ‘old life’ that you miss.

Community and Independence
- What people, emotions and/or organizations do you feel contributed to your becoming a farmer?
- In your own words, please describe your local farming community and your relationship to it.
- Please describe the farming community in your area and your various connections to it.
- Which farms, organizations or individuals do you feel most connected to as a farmer?
- In your eyes, describe what is meant by a “local food system”.
- Who are your customers? How do you reach them? How do they connect with you?
- Are these communities important to you? Why?
- In what ways do you represent yourselves to you customers and the public?
- What are your main messages important to you? Why?
- What perception do you think the public have of you as a farmer?
- As a farmer, what do you see as your role in supporting local food systems grow?
- How do you determine food prices?
- What do you enjoy about being a small business owner? Does this match your personality?
- What things are you doing differently to set you apart from others?
- What was your biggest barrier to getting started?
- How do you market your food to customers? Does this help make a living?
- In what ways, if any are you working to ensure the transmission of farming knowledge to other young people?
- Has farming been a tool to restore a more ‘traditional lifestyle”? Why should we revive this lifestyle?

Political Alignment
- Do you believe becoming a farmer is a political move? Why or why not?
- In what kinds of difficulties ways do seed companies pose for you?
- What is your political alignment?
- Do you think that a lot of our traditional farming knowledge has been lost? Why or why not?
- In what state do you wish the environment to be in for the next generation - your children?
- How can we change the system to benefit new farmers?
- How would you define new and old farmers?